DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 477 CS 214 602

AUTHOR McGavin, Dan
TITLE Not Including Us: Discourse Communities and the Interference of Leadership.
PUB DATE Jul 94
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition (13th, University Park, PA, July 13-16, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Higher Education; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Interprofessional Relationship; Leadership; Organizational Climate; *Power Structure
IDENTIFIERS *Discourse Communities

ABSTRACT

An illustrative story of a graduate student serves to show that as the literate discourse community lives out the tension between those who initiate shared power and those who maintain traditional standards, discourse communities can include or exclude others by using the power of leadership. Discourse communities act through professional meetings, scholarly journals, and the normal actions of departmental life. Three classifications of power work together to discipline members within a community: showing sufficient resources to discourage challenges to those resources; changing flexible social fields into hardened, objectified structures; and acting out culturally defined social roles to perpetuate subordination. Any member of a discourse community can be made subordinate by these disciplinary means used by leaders of a community. (RS)

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ED 376 477

Not Including Us: Discourse Communities and the Interference of Leadership

Presented at the 1994 Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition
by
Dan McGavin
Michigan Technological University, Davenport College of Business
djmcgavi@mtu.edu

As the literate discourse community lives out the tension between those who initiate shared power and those who maintain traditional standards, discourse communities can include or exclude others by using the power of leadership. When leaders see members of a community as "others," power relationships can be used to construct and maintain others as subordinant. In this paper, I begin with a fictitious example and then discuss the means by which members of discourse communities may be kept from full participation in the community.

In January 1990, my niece, Shelia, was excited when she called to tell me she was accepted in the Biology department's Master's program at St Hellens University in Chicago. At that time she was 30 years old and a single mother of two. Shelia had begun the program as a result of a divorce and with the financial assistance of the state and the university to marginally support her family, fulfill her interest and ability in science, and establish a career and stability for herself and for her children. Of course, she needed the Master's degree to live above subsistence level. In addition, she saw herself picking up the pieces of an excellent Bachelor's degree education at Aquinas College. Her acceptance meant that she would be teaching an Introduction to Biology class to first year students. In addition, she applied to be a research assistant, an honor granted to few first year graduate students.

As school began in the fall, she called me, excited to tell me that at the first graduate student meeting, she was notified of her award as "Outstanding New Student" and given a research assistantship.

"There was even a signed declaration and everything," she said. "It was amazing. And then, guess what, uncle Dan, I am going to work with Dr. Bouchard, the one who is working on the human genome project. It's really exciting." In exchange for this opportunity to work on the project, and to work with a "name" person in the field, she was given a small stipend, and required to work for 20 hours a week directly with the professor.

CS214402

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Professor Henri Bouchard had quite a reputation. Four years ago the department with the university's financial help enlisted him to secure a grant to work of the genome project. As one of the most respected biologists in his field, he brought the university a 3.6 million dollar grant and additional prestige to St. Hellens. Shelia felt honored to be chosen by the professor to assist in his research.

Professor Bouchard was teaching two classes per week and worked in the lab the rest of the time. When classes started, Shelia found out that she was not going to work on the human genome project. Instead of a research assistant, she was to be his TA, or teacher assistant. As his assistant, Dr. Bouchard told her that she was to take role in his classes, prepare the overheads and audiovisuals, and grade exams and record them on his computer. Dr. Bouchard marked her time in fifteen minute increments. By mid term, Shelia was fit to be tied.

She couldn't complain to the department head since Dr. Bouchard was a respected researcher in the field, worked in the same lab as the department head and was seen frequently with several of the department leaders, including the head of the department. "How can I even think of complaining, uncle Dan, when I was given this award as Outstanding Student?"

"What about other graduate students," I asked? "Don't they have the same trouble? Can't you figure out what to do as a group? You're teachers, too, aren't you? What about department meetings? Couldn't you bring it up there?"

"Not a chance," she said. "We're university employees, but even though we teach more classes than many professors, we aren't really members of the department. They don't tell us about meetings, and when would we have a chance to go? Any way, even if we went, we can't even vote. Besides, I don't want to blow my chances for the future. I just got here. The kids are adjusting , and I just couldn't face the thought of moving back home a failure. Any way, I'm pretty much alone on this issue. Other graduate students sympathize, I mean we're all under such pressure anyway, but what can we do? Besides, I'm the one with the award, remember? All I've got show for it is a special parking place."

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As the story of my niece points out, discourse communities sanction and discipline their members as a matter of course, as John Swales points out. Discourse communities act not only at conventions and through journals, but as Mary Louise Pratt suggests, they act every day in departments as members of a discourse community rub elbows in the normal actions of departmental life. The contact zones exist not only between cultures but

within them. Acting at the local level discourse communities not only sanction language and thus knowledge, but they also use power to subordinate others, preventing them from being full participants in the community.

The questions I would like to address are these: By what means do discourse communities, acting at the local level, keep others from becoming full members in the community, and how do these disciplinary actions prevent subordinates from seeing the possibility of taking meaningful action? To answer the first question, I suggest that there are three classifications of power that may work together to discipline members within a community to prevent full participation:

- First, a show of sufficient amount of resources or strength, enough to discourage and prevent a challenge to those resources.
- Second, changing flexible social fields into hardened, objectified structures, and
- Third, acting out culturally defined social roles.

I suggest, further, that personal agency is reduced because means of subordination overlap one another, interpenetrate one another, diffuse any simplicity or discreteness, and prevent subordinates from seeing the possibility of any subsequent change or full participation in the life of the community.

Preventing Counterchallange

The first means of subordination is preventing counter challenge. Mouss found that status and power were implicit in gifts between cultures. If a gift was more impressive and prevented any return gift of equal or higher value, the gift giving culture maintained status and prestige over another culture. Several conditions were attendent: each gift represented the aesthetic, religious, social, political, and economic values of the culture; the gift was given in formal or ritualized situations by individuals that represent both cultures; and each gift implied a return gift.

Shelia was given a gift, an award presented ceremonially and ritually by the head of the graduate department. As a representative of her culture, she confirmed graduate student subordination by being unable to return the gift with a display of resources greater than that of the department's. Her only return gift, and that of the culture she represented, was diligence. In addition, Dr. Bouchard's challenge, representing the department, prevents any possibility of counter-challenge.

As they react with one another over time, the value of the gifts and their signs become fixed or stratified. Because of his value to the university and his Ph.D. from Harvard, Dr. Bouchard's stature is signified by his professorship and the human genome project, and stratified by the money and notoriety the project brings to the university. By contrast, Shelia who works just as hard and but does not have the prestige or status of the university, cannot challenge Dr. Bouchard's resources.

Because it is more economical and efficient to rule by popular demand, leaders must be seen to gain the community's support, which, according to Machevelli, is important since it conserves resources that may be needed to quell insurrections. Leaders must seem to be scrupulous in dealing with committees of advisors and reward them for good and faithful service, but never promote them so far as to make them a threat to their own power. By monitoring subordinate's resources, leaders of discourse communities limit the actions of others.

Objectification

Another means of control is the tendency to convert dynamic social relationships into distinct and measurable objects, making some subordinate to the scrutiny of others.

Both Dr. Bouchard and Shelia are qualified to teach introduction to Biology at the university. And, as Marx would say, they have the same labor time. However, their positions have acted and reacted with one another historically, stratifying their relative positions. Dr. Bouchard has a voice in changing policy concerning course outlines and teaching. He can do as much as he wishes. However, Shelia's supervisor is careful to observe her classes, prescribe what may be taught and how, and pointedly evaluate her behavior. As Foucault would note, Shelia was kept so busy learning and practicing the minutia of the university and the department related to correct behavior that she had little time and no inclination to do anything else.

In addition, Shelia's clerical role, hidden under the guise of research assistant, is fixed to hide previous social actions which have determined what people in clerical positions can and can't do. Shelia is identified as an outstanding graduate student, has earned a Bachelor's degree in a scientific field relevant to a specialized field of study, has worked in two labs for five years, but her role is defined as clerical by Dr. Bouchard. Once the assignation was understood, the objectified behavior related to the role is also assumed by Bouchard and by Shelia. Even though she has interest and ability that go far beyond clerical work, and even though her actions and behavior would be appropriate in the role of scientist, she doesn't complain about not being allowed into the lab to work on the genome project, and she is expected (and expects herself) as a graduate assistant to fulfill her role as secretary to Dr. Bouchard. It is an expectation of secretaries not to talk out of turn, not to

question unless it is for clarification, and to silently and efficiently fulfill her duties. She assumes the social relations and circumscribed behavior, unspoken in her identity as secretary

The more specific the level of social responsibility within the discourse community, the more quantifiable, observable, and measurable the work. At Shelia's level of assistantship, tasks are more certainly measurable and quantifiable, such as taking attendance, grading exams, meeting at certain times and certain places, counting "payable" time in 15 minute increments. The common sense of this system combine with her strong work ethic, and make it unlikely for Shelia to do other than she is doing. To Shelia, movement seems to emanate from Dr. Bouchard and the department and flow toward Shelia and other graduate students.

Creating Common Sense

Discourse communities also act out culturally defined social roles and perpetuate subordination. Formal education has a long tradition of subordination. Since the middle ages, with the rise of the middle class, formalized education has maintained students as children, not allowing them to act as part of the adult community as apprentices did in earlier times, as noted by Phillipe Aries. My niece Shelia, even at the age of thirty, as a student is also considered a child by parents and teachers. Constructed and maintained as a child and a student, separate from the life of the adult community (the biology lab and the genome project, voting rights in the department, for example), she cannot see herself in any other way and is, therefore, prevented from acting as an adult.

Althusser notes that dominant ideas and beliefs are communicated through a web of seemingly independent institutions like education, religion and the law that interdependently create and maintain the common sense of cultural norms. Thus, behavior and feelings can be predicted and directed as "right" before they are even spoken or enacted. Shelia follows the common sense of the department, taking courses, obeying the rules, filling out the forms, meeting with committees, because she knows that it is what is expected. She cannot think of herself as coworker and she cannot think of bringing grievances against Dr. Bouchard, even though he continually browbeats her for minute differences between her actions and his unexplained assumptions about her educational background and level of experience. She is prevented form full membership in the community.

Conclusion

Whether it is Shelia as a teacher of biology, an assistant professor, or a full professor whose specialties are currently not in favor, all can be made subordinate by these disciplinary means used by leaders of a community. All of these methods of subordination, the show of strength to prevent a

challenge to that strength, the substitution of rationalism and objectivity for subjective relationships, and following dominant cultural roles overlap and diffuse together. Remove one cause of subordination and another equally as strong remains. Remove two and one is enough to prevent change. It is their diffusion from discreteness that prevents Shelia or other subordinated members of a community from identifying causes and thus meaningful agency. I conclude with the words of Foucault, "Discourse is the intersection of power and knowledge" and with those of David J. Miller, "There can be no self-determination without possibility."

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